



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION

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Mui Mui Hin-McCormick

Legislative Analyst

Alok Bhatt

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Arlene Avery. I serve as the Legislative Committee chair of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission. I live in Stafford, CT. I represent Tolland County on the Commission. I urge your upmost support for APAAC and all the Legislative Commissions.

These Commissions were established by the legislature to help advise the General Assembly and the Governor's Office on how to best serve the most vulnerable members of our communities. This role is particularly important when it comes to Connecticut's small and diverse Asian American communities. Our tiny staff of two and our volunteer Commissioners work diligently to identify and address basic unmet needs. While Asian Americans make up only 4.5% of Connecticut's population, we are mostly immigrants who struggle with language and cultural barriers. We speak more than fifty different languages. Our community members struggle with language access in healthcare, education and in dealings with government agencies.

Our communities include many refugees who have secured political asylum here, including those from Tibet, Cambodia and Vietnam, and persecuted ethnic minorities like the Shan, the Karen, the Hmong and the Lao Lu from Southeast Asia. Our Executive Director Mui Mui is a refugee from Laos. Our Commission chair, Trung Le is a refugee from Vietnam. Many of our refugees endured atrocities at the hands of government agents in their home countries. Many arrive here traumatized and distrustful of government. This makes our work all the more challenging and vital.

Additionally, many of our community members have endured racism, bullying, discrimination and bigotry right here in Connecticut. I first learned of racism during recess in elementary school. Bullies would yell, "You can't play tag with us. We don't want your chink germs." "Go back to China where you came from." I was born right here in Connecticut. Forty years later I find myself advising women whose Asian American children and grandchildren are being bullied in school.

Members of our Muslim and Sikh communities have endured grave injustices including hate crimes like the shooting of the Mosque in Meriden this past November, racial profiling and job discrimination. I'd like to end by reading statements written by Kanwaljit Singh, who lost

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his job at Electric Boat because he was perceived to be a Muslim. Kanwaljit is a former member of our Commission.

"My Story: I want to share with you about a situation when right after 9/11 - I started a job at Electric Boat, people blow horns at me, gave [me] bad looks, told my boss why he hired me. I have to cut my hairs against my religion to be safe and when I grow them back and put turban back - few months later my boss laid me off by making this comment that he was not able to convince [the] other managers that I am not a Muslim and [that] I am a Sikh from India."

There's still so much to do. I strongly urge your budget support so that the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission can continue its vital work. Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Arlene Avery

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